



**Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
Southern District of Texas**

Don DeGabrielle • United States Attorney

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
MARCH 24, 2006
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JOHN YEMBRICK
PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE
(713) 567-9388

**JURY CONVICTS BROWNSVILLE MAN FOR IMPORTING COCAINE IN
SECRET COMPARTMENT**

BROWNSVILLE, TX– A federal jury has convicted Apolinar Gracia Jr., 34, of Brownsville, of two counts of conspiracy and the importation and possession with intent to distribute 51 kilograms of cocaine. The jury's verdict, which convicted Gracia of all four counts of the indictment, follows a three day trial and less than an hour of deliberation. United States District Judge Hilda Tagle, who presided over the trial, has set sentencing for June 19th, 2006. As to each of the four counts of conviction, Gracia faces a mandatory minimum sentence of ten years imprisonment, without parole, and a maximum of life. Each count also carries a maximum fine of \$4 million.

During the trial, which began on Tuesday, March 21, 2006, the United States presented testimony and evidence proving that on December 17, 2005, Gracia entered the United States from Mexico at the Brownsville, Texas, port of entry in a vehicle containing 51 kilograms of cocaine in a hidden compartment driven by Oralia Valenzuela-Montoya, 66.

The cocaine, with an estimated value of \$500,000, was discovered by federal law enforcement agents during an inspection in an elaborate compartment created by welding a lead-lined false floor over the factory floor of the vehicle.

Federal agents testified at trial that Gracia made statements at the time of his arrest demonstrating he was aware of the contraband concealed in the vehicle when he entered the United States. Gracia has been in federal custody without bond since his arrest in December 2005 and will remain in federal custody pending his sentencing.

Co-defendant, Oralia Valenzuela-Montoya, 66, a Mexican national and resident alien of the United States at the time of her arrest, was convicted of possession with intent to distribute the 51 kilograms of cocaine on February 28, 2006 after pleading guilty to the offense. Valenzuela also faces a mandatory minimum sentence of 10 years imprisonment, without parole, and a maximum of life and a \$4 million fine. She has been in federal custody since her arrest and will remain in federal custody pending her sentencing set for June 1, 2006.

This case was investigated by Immigration and Custom Enforcement Special Agents and officers with Customs and Border Protection. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Bill Hagen.

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